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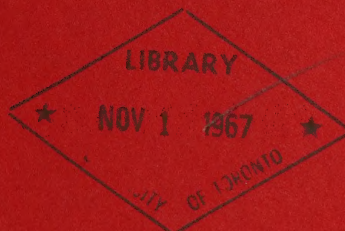
"MEETING
POVERTY"



Canada
SPECIAL
PLANNING
SECRETARIAT

#131 Community Development in Alberta;

Provincial Government of Alberta



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COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN ALBERTA

Community Development is a new program in Alberta. Officially it was born in February of 1964, but it became an operational fact only in August, 1964, when the first Community Development Officer was assigned to a community.

Setting up, programming and carrying on a Community Development program has provided us with many experiences and stimulated some insights which may have relevance for this Conference and the programs which hopefully may follow.

What is Community Development?

As a means of exposing the writer's biases let me list a couple of standard definitions of the term Community Development and proceed to examine the details and make changes in them in accordance with my own thoughts on the subject.

The Shorter United Nations Definition

"Community Development is a process designed to create conditions of economic and social progress for the whole community with its active participation and the fullest possible reliance upon the community's initiative."

The Ashridge Conference Definition

"Community development is a movement designed to promote better living for the whole community with the active participation and, if possible, on the initiative of the community, but if this initiative is not forthcoming spontaneously, by the use of techniques for arousing and stimulating it in order to secure the active and enthusiastic response to the movement."

These two definitions conjointly provide the basis for the community level definition which we have utilized in Alberta and upon which our work is based. In attempting to reach a working model, we took exception to such phrases as "a process designed to create conditions of social and economic progress" suggesting instead that Community Development is really concerned with creating conditions favourable to social and economic change. We substituted the word "change" for "progress" as implying less in value judgments.

We believe Community Development is a process designed to do two things:

1. to maximize opportunities for people through a better understanding of their own potential and that of their environment (physical and social); and
2. to stimulate people to action.

Whether or not this process leads to "better living" or improved living conditions or even to an improved social status is not for the practitioner but the client to determine.

From the preceding then, we arrive at our modification of these definitions of Community Development:

"Community Development is an educational-motivational process designed to create conditions favourable to economic and social change, if possible on the initiative of the community, but if this initiative is not forthcoming spontaneously, then techniques for arousing and stimulating it in order to secure the fullest participation of the community must be utilized."

Why a Community Development Program in Alberta?

In Alberta the stimulus for establishing a Community Development agency lays in the recognition of a constellation of social and economic problems which symptomize the unhealthy position of a specific ethnic population (the people of Indian ancestry) within our total society. To use Walter Rudnicki's phrase people of Indian ancestry are "a high cost, multi-problem segment of our society."

From the point of view of Government then, people of Indian ancestry are not only being inefficiently utilized as units of our economic system which has ramifications for the rest of our social system, but they are also a direct drain upon the public pocketbook in terms of the relatively high social maintenance costs involved in sustaining even a minimal standard of living for them.

Faced with those facts the Government of Alberta created a Community Development Branch in the Department of Industry & Development and charged it with the responsibility of producing a Community Development Program which would seek answers to some of the problems referred to above.

We think it is important to recognize two key points.

First, Community Development is government-initiated. The native people of Alberta did not initiate or even know about Community Development in early 1964 despite the fact that they were ostensibly the people with the problems. However, in an affluent society such as the one we enjoy in Canada, socially and economically disadvantaged people (especially if race is also a factor) are an affront to our political system, our economic system, our educational system; indeed to our country. Hence a societal problem is recognized and as the representatives for political action, government, was first to delineate "the problem" and suggest a solution.

Secondly, at government level, Community Development is a Program. The responsibility of the programmer is to recognize the problems which the Government has and the problems which the clients (in this case the people of Indian ancestry in Alberta) have and to attempt through Program to make Government and clients relate to each other in a more meaningful way.

Community Development is Program from the point of view of Government but from the point of view of community (the clients), Community Development is mainly Method and Process and only initially is it Program. Thus our definition of Community Development which we gave in the preceding section is a community-level definition, not a Government-level definition.

We have already stated that Community Development is "Program" mainly from where Government sits and that from the point of view of a community, Community Development is seen as a Method and as a Process.

In Alberta, the Community Development Program impinges upon community very lightly. The community is made aware of the Program through the news media or through visits by Community Development specialists who travel throughout the Province explaining the Program. Beyond that the only effect of Program on a community comes when a community is proclaimed a project area, a Community Development Officer arrives with his family to live and begin learning about the people and their problems.

How this last point is accomplished is the key to Method and the beginning of Process.

Method & Process

The definition which we arrived at above obviously must contain within it the seeds of the methodology to be followed:

We have indicated:

1. Community Development is an educational process.
2. Community Development is a motivational process.
3. Community Development is designed to promote change.
4. The initiative of the people is important.
5. The involvement of the people is important.
6. The role of the Community Development Officer is dynamic, not passive.

Among these six points, which are not listed in any special order, the role of the Community Development Officer is crucial. For this reason, a great deal of thought is given to the kind of person required to do the job and a great deal of care is given to recruitment.

We are interested in hiring married men who have a good understanding of individual and group psychology and social process (preferably with a degree in one of the social sciences). More important than an academic degree, however, are personal qualities of maturity and sensitivity and the ability to operate in a non-directive manner.

A candidate's wife is always interviewed and in her we look for self-sufficiency and qualities which we feel would be supportive of her husband and his role in a native community.

When a Community Development Officer is assigned to a project area in Alberta, he is given three specific instructions:

1. He must get to know the community to which he is assigned, its people and their problems.
2. He must seek out the local leaders and encourage their growth in leadership skills.
3. He must assist the local people to clarify and achieve self-determined goals in his role as a resource person to the whole community.

The crucial aspect of a Community Development Officer's work is in his ability to create learning situations and allow people to actually learn from them. In a problem-solving situation, it is sometimes extremely difficult for the Community Development Officer to resist the temptation to supply the answer which he thinks the group will finally reach or which he thinks the group ought to reach. It is particularly taxing for a Community Development Officer to resist imposing his will if he fears that the local people are making a serious mistake which may cost them time or money or may even effect group solidarity. The difficult part of all this for the Community Development Officer is that he will be urged by the local people to assume a leadership role, however, whenever he does so, he is automatically robbing his clients of a learning experience which they need to go through if the edifice the group is building is not to collapse when the Community Development Officer is withdrawn.

Withdrawal of the Community Development Officer should be a recognized part of the Process, recognized by the Community Development Officer and by the community. If a C.D.O. is to be available in perpetuity, then there is little value in learning situations - local improvement - motivation for action, etc. We could more efficiently solve the majority of our problems by appointing a community manager, however, if it is our intention to create viable community, the process is both longer and more complicated.

Relevance of Community Development to Opportunity Programs

In a recent article entitled "Poverty and Social Change"--Scientific American - May 1965 - Alexander H. Leighton said in relation to "war on poverty" programs:

"...it is necessary that the offers of better education and of training in marketable skills go hand in hand with help in learning the elements of human relations."

This conclusion of Leighton's is apparently supported by the inclusion of papers on "attitudes" and "Community Factors" among the articles in the "Profile of Poverty in Canada" booklet which was prepared by the members of the Special Planning Secretariat for this conference.

We in Alberta also concur with this conclusion. Indeed we would suggest that unless special emphasis is given to the human relations factor in opportunity programs, then we will seriously limit the effectiveness of these programs.

The special concerns which Community Development practitioners must feel regarding massive opportunity programs are four in number and are interrelated. We are not primarily concerned about lack of understanding at the policy level of governments; this can grow. Nor are we primarily concerned about lack of funds or technical resources or research; these also can grow.

We are concerned about:

1. Process,
2. Method,
3. Intra-governmental pressures, and
4. Societal pressures.

Process

If, as the initial paragraph of Chapter 8 (Profile of Poverty in Canada) suggests, the "poverty syndrome" is reinforced and perpetuated by attitudes, ameliorative programs must be concerned not only with money, jobs, housing and education, but also with attitudes and social skills; in other words with the human relations factor. Values, attitudes, behaviour and social skills are seldom learned by instant revelation; most people learn and unlearn the elements of human relations by going through a long and sometimes arduous process.

It is the hope of Community Development practitioners that time will be permitted and that the value of process will be recognized.

Method

Everyone who has worked in Community Development for any period of time will have heard some technical specialist or administrator exclaim:

"But I've been doing Community Development for years!"

Perhaps this is so, but one is more often impressed by the number of those who can verbalize the philosophy without being able to apply the method. One doesn't do Community Development in the sense that one does the work involved in a specialist role. Rather one follows a certain methodology which allows the Community Development process to occur. The methodology includes the creation of a practitioner's community image, not from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., but twenty-four hours of each day. It involves honing his own human relations skills. It means overcoming barriers of race or creed or ethnic background or educational and economic differences. It means, pivotally, communication.

The method of Community Development is an approach to people from a position lacking in power (money or authority) utilizing communications skills in a non-directive manner in an attempt to initiate Process.

As we indicated earlier (page 5), not everyone can follow this method or will permit the process to occur unhindered and this is what concerns us about any widespread opportunity program. Where will the practitioners come from?

Intra-Governmental Pressures

One of the stimuli motivating this conference was the recognition by the Federal and Provincial governments that new ideas and new programs are going to be required to deal with the problems of poverty in affluent Canada.

It might with some truth be said that the problem here is essentially one of poverty of imagination. It is being realized more and more by many of those most intimately concerned that sincere, even sometimes dedicated, devotion to conventional Civil Service methods, have not produced anything like the results that could reasonably be expected from the expenditures involved.

Such new ideas and new approaches which we are all seeking here may in fact run counter to that aspect of government which rises to mind whenever we think of the terms: institutionalized - accountability - precedent.

For example, in our brief history in Alberta, we have in the course of initiating a new program run afoul of numerous regulations relating to hiring, housing, removal expenses, expense accounts, requisitions for supplies, etc. Our methods have apparently been at variance with normal government regulations, devised and no doubt wisely devised, to control the conventional procedures. Big Brother (our Treasury Computer) who sees into the darkest corners of every Division and Branch, exerts a tremendous pressure to conform the normal practice which runs back along the system of authorized relations to the initial culprit. Nor does the pressure end there. An individual who in off hours is the soul of generosity and Christian charity sits in his office and jealously guards his right to initial an invoice or stamp a requisition and even more derogating, he adds his voice to the clamour that the up-start program must not receive special or even different favours.

M.C. Smith in his book "Government in Zazzau (Oxford University Press - 1960 - page 15) stated:

"The system of administrative action through which the business of government is carried on is a system of authority and authorized relations, order, obligations and rights."

Our question then concerns the degree of flexibility which one can expect from any large administrative system and whether or not it is capable of adapting to meet the needs of new programs in areas where government has demonstrably failed in the past. Will we be swamped by the pressures to regularize in line with present practices or is it possible that new rules and regulations can be devised which will be more flexible yet equally regulatory?

Sociotal Pressures

The last paragraph in Chapter 8 (Profile of Poverty in Canada) has succinctly summarized our concerns relating to the effect of the majority society upon opportunity programs:

"The attitudes of the rest of society largely determine whether the attitudes of the poor can change in ways which will speed up the elimination of poverty. The unsettled question is how far the dominant attitudes will permit the institutions to change."

